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SUBJECT: TURKEY CONTINUING EU REFORMS DESPITE SETBACK

REF: ANKARA 0078

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4(b)(d)

1.(C) Summary: The EU's partial suspension of negotiations and election-year politics have not stopped the Turkish bureaucracy's forging ahead on harmonization reforms. However, as State Minister Babacan and others have told us, the government says it is doing the reforms because they are good for Turkey, not because the EU requires them. The government is putting its final touches on its 2007-2013 EU road map by soliciting comments from Turkish NGOs, and expects to release the final plan in April. Though a double election year has caused politicians to shelve most controversial issues such as amendment of Penal Code Article 301 (insulting "Turkishness"), the Turkish bureaucracy is working hard to harmonize its laws with EU standards. The GOT expects the EU will open negotiations on at least three chapters during the German Presidency. While the bureaucracy will continue to carry out needed reforms over the next several years, and the GOT may again take up controversial political issues after elections, contentious issues such as Cyprus remain as road-blocks on Turkey's path to EU membership. End summary.

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GOT Putting Finishing Touches on EU Road Map  
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2.(SBU) Babacan and other GOT leaders have emphasized that reforms, whether or not related to EU membership, have to be presented to the Turkish public as necessary for Turkey, rather than as EU requirements, following the December EU decision to suspend eight chapters (reftel). In keeping with this approach, Dogan said the road map was elaborated without consultation with the EU since the road map defines sequencing rather than the content of individual reforms. Given the current ambiguity about the EU's ultimate willingness to admit Turkey, Dogan admitted there is more of an incentive to back-load the most difficult reforms.

3.(SBU) Turkey's EU Secretariat Political Counselor Ahmet Dogan told us that the GOT is soliciting comments from Turkish NGOs on the five-year EU road map prepared by Turkey's EU Harmonization Steering Committee, chaired by State Minister Ali Babacan and composed of officials from the MFA, the EU Secretariat, the State Planning Office, and the Prime Ministry. The Steering Committee used input from all

government departments involved in EU harmonization for the draft, which lists the laws and regulations Turkey aims to pass each year, their status, and the lead institution for each law. Dogan expected that within two weeks the Steering Committee would consider the NGO comments, finalize the draft, and send it to senior members of the GOT for their political sign-off before making the road map public. He estimated that a formal road map document would be completed in April.

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While "Hot Issues" are Stalled  
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4.(SBU) Election-year politics will make it difficult to tackle controversial issues in 2007, according to Dogan, and politicians would not dare touch "hot issues" such as Turkish Penal Code Article 301 (insulting "Turkishness"), the re-opening of Halki Seminary, or the Law on Foundations, prior to May's presidential elections. Dogan expected that after the presidential election, the government might re-pass the Law on Foundations that President Sezer vetoed in November 2006. He described Article 301 and Halki Seminary, however, as purely political issues that were not included in the road map and would be dictated by the political climate.

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Technical Work Proceeds Apace  
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5.(SBU) Meanwhile, Dogan said Turkey has continued to work feverishly at the technical level since the EU's December decision to suspend negotiations on eight Acquis chapters.

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The GOT expected the EU to open negotiations on three chapters during the German Presidency -- Enterprise and Industrial Policy; Economic and Monetary Policy; and Statistics. The EU could open the Enterprise and Industrial Policy as early as March 29, making it the second negotiating chapter opened since Turkey's EU accession talks started in October 2005.

6.(SBU) Dogan told us the Turkish bureaucracy for the most part buried its disappointment and frustration with the EU's December suspension decision (reftel), and proceeded apace on technical harmonization issues. He pointed out that the bureaucracy feels constrained by the EU's position that no chapter may be closed until Turkey implements the Additional Protocol by opening its air and sea ports to Cyprus. The Cyprus issue will come to a head within two to three years when GOT will be ready, but not permitted, to close several new chapters, Dogan predicted.

7.(C) Comment: Hard feelings following the EU's partial suspension of negotiations and the politics of a double election year have not stopped the GOT from forging ahead on harmonization reforms, although politicians have shelved controversial issues such as Penal Code Article 301. The GOT's harmonization roadmap, prepared with input from across the government, exemplifies the bureaucracy's determination to continue EU harmonization efforts. While such technical-level reforms are likely to continue, and the GOT may again take up controversial political issues after this year's elections, contentious issues such as Cyprus remain as road-blocks on Turkey's path to EU membership. End comment.

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